OVERSEAS CONFLICTS

U.S. Agencies Have Coordinated Stabilization Efforts but Need to Document Their Agreement

What GAO Found

The Departments of State (State) and Defense (DOD), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP)—an independent, federally funded institute—reported conducting various efforts to address conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization for Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria in fiscal year 2017. For example, in Iraq, State supported efforts to remove improvised explosive devices from homes and infrastructure (see figure); USAID contributed to the United Nations to restore essential services; DOD provided immediate medical trauma supplies to the World Health Organization to treat injured civilians; and USIP conducted facilitated dialogs to enable local reconciliation in areas liberated from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Example of U.S. Department of State Stabilization Effort in Iraq

In conducting U.S. conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization efforts, State, USAID, DOD, and USIP have addressed aspects of key collaboration practices such as elements of bridging organizational cultures and leadership. However, the agencies have not formally documented their agreement on coordination for U.S. stabilization efforts through formal written guidance and agreements that address key collaboration practices. GAO found the following, for example, with regard to the extent key collaboration practices have been used by these entities.

**Bridging organizational cultures:** U.S. agencies have established various mechanisms to coordinate their efforts, such as interagency working groups and staff positions focused on coordination. USIP convenes interagency actors, including State, USAID, and DOD through various programs and events.

**Defining outcomes and accountability:** One or more agencies have established some common outcomes and accountability mechanisms for their stabilization efforts in Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria. Moreover, through an interagency review of U.S. stabilization assistance, State, USAID, and DOD identified a need to develop an outcome-based political strategy outlining end states for U.S. stabilization efforts and strategic analytics to track and measure progress, among other needs.

**Written guidance and agreements:** Although State, USAID, and DOD have developed a framework for stabilization, they have not documented their agreement on the key collaboration practices identified, such as defining outcomes and accountability and clarifying roles and responsibilities. According to key practices for enhancing interagency collaboration, articulating agreements in formal documents can strengthen collaborative efforts, and reduce the potential for duplication, overlap, and fragmentation.

What GAO Recommends

State, USAID, and DOD should document agreement on their coordination for U.S. stabilization efforts through formal written guidance and agreements addressing key collaboration practices. The agencies concurred with the recommendations.